

Onion

History

Onions can be traced back thousands of years to Central Asia and the Middle East. Historians conclude that onions have been cultivated for at least the past 5,000 years. They have been used as food, medicine, and even in mummification in ancient Egypt. Ancient Egyptians saw onions as a symbol of eternal life because of the circular layers. Onions have been found in pharaohs' tombs and in many ancient Egyptian paintings. The Greeks also thought onions were a source of power- Greek athletes and soldiers would eat them and rub the juices on themselves for strength. Onions grow in over 20 states in the United States. California, Oregon, and Washington are the top producing states.

The bulb of the onion grows underground, with green tops shooting upward. They are a part of the allium family with scallions and leeks.

Onions contain fiber and vitamin C, which boosts the immune system. This explains why onions were taken to sea by sailors who needed vitamin C-rich fruits and vegetables to prevent a vitamin C deficiency called scurvy. Onions are easy to store and keep, which is why they often were on board these ships.



Varieties

Yellow onions make up the majority of onions grown in the US and are used primarily for cooking.

Red onions are typically served fresh or raw as a garnish or as part of a recipe.

White onions are traditionally used in Mexican dishes, as well as sauces and salads.

Scallions, also known as green onions, are long, slender and have a mild “onion” flavor.

Leeks are long, thick, green, and have a sweet flavor.

Fun Facts

- In some cultures, onion tops are braided and then hung in cool air for months for later use- especially during the winter months
- When onions are cut, a compound is released and turns to sulfuric acid in the air- this is what makes people cry when they cook with onions
- If the onion is cold, the sulfur compound is inactivated- try to chill your onions for tear-free cooking
- This sulfur compound is thought to prevent heart disease and certain cancers
- The average American eats 18 pounds of onion a year



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